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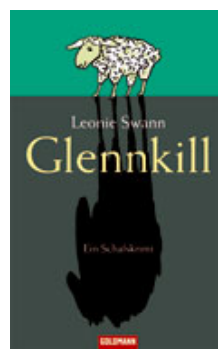
Be it women's crime fiction, regional detective novels, political murder mysteries, historical crime novels, thrillers, or recently even a crime novel about wine: the crime literature scene in the German language is more diverse than ever before.

But what actually constitutes a good crime novel? When does one crime novel become a bestseller while others gather dust on the bookshop shelves? A new discovery on the crime literature scene must have that certain "something", it must arouse the reader's curiosity and stand out from the masses. Can for instance the success of *Three Bags Full* by author Leonie Swann, which was awarded the Friederich Glauser Prize for the best crime fiction debut in 2006 and has sold very well abroad so far, be explained in this way? The story is certainly original: Swann has an Irish herd of sheep solving a crime incident.

Antiheroes are in demand

One tendency in modern German crime literature that breaks with the conventions of a classic crime thriller is the use of antiheroes as protagonists. This development can also be observed in the Scandinavian crime fiction genre, for example from Henning Mankell's character Kurt Wallander.

The antihero as a detective first emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century in the hard-boiled school, which was made famous by authors such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. Their tough guys were already rejecting the detective figure of the classic British whodunit (for instance Agatha Christie's Miss Marple), whose investigations are still driven by rationality and logic. Post-modern crime literature develops the antihero further. Richard Brautigan's antihero C. Card in *Dreaming of Babylon* is a textbook example of a loser. By chance he stumbles upon a case that absolutely cannot be solved. Brautigan's crime novel is the rejection of the genre, a parody.



German authors such as Jörg Juretzka, Jakob Arjouni or the writer duo Kobr and Klüpfel belong to this tradition. The detective becomes a likeable character who does not embody the personality type of the perfect, omniscient investigator, but is rather a figure who uses intuition, good understanding of people and plenty of courage to solve his or her cases. At the same time they always remain social outsiders and are portrayed with all their human weaknesses.

Brenner's back

The fact that readers value eccentric detective characters can be seen from Wolf Haas' Brenner. His novel *Brenner and God*, published in 2009, is staying on the top places of the bestseller lists, it is being noticed in the culture and arts sections of the national newspapers.

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The book is the seventh volume in the Brenner series. Austrian Author Haas actually wanted to kill off the narrator after volume six and thereby bring the Brenner series to an end. Then Haas had to find out for himself that you can't just "bump off" language – the Brenner crime novel is back and the narrator begins his resurrection with the following sentence: "My grandmother always said to me that once you die, your mouth has to be killed off separately."

The Brenner crime novels are not standard genre literature. In these books language itself becomes a motive of the story. It is an art form to which the reader must first become accustomed: omission, abbreviation and dialect become aspects of style. This peculiarity could be the reason why Haas was inundated with rejections at first before a publisher dared to publish the thriller.

The fact that Haas has written a real success story since then is proved not only by being awarded the *Deutscher Krimipreis* (German crime literature prize) three times (1997 for *Resurrection of the Dead*, 1999 for *Come, Sweet Death*, and 2000 for *Silentium!*), but also the film versions of the novels *Come, Sweet Death*, *Silentium!* and *Skeleton Man*. His latest thriller *Brenner and God* was even long-listed for the *Deutscher Buchpreis* (German Book Prize), an award that honours the best contemporary novel of the year.

Allgäu – scene of the crime

Authors Michael Kobr and Volker Klüpfel have brought an antihero to life as well, in the form of their *Kommissar Kluftinger* (Inspector Kluftinger). In the five thrillers that have already been published, such as *Rauhnacht* (The Twelve Days of Christmas) and *Laienspiel* (Amateur Dramatics) it seems as if crime always troubles the idyllic Allgäu and therefore the Inspector himself just when he is pursuing his leisure activities. Whether he is eating *Kässpätzchen* (Austrian dumpling and cheese casserole), on a weekend break, or rehearsing for a big open-air production of *William Tell* at the time, Kluftinger is always confronted with cases he would rather walk away from to start with. In *Amateur Dramatics* he has to collaborate with the BKA (Federal Criminal Police Office) to solve a terrorist crime. He quickly realises that he has lost contact with the new information-orientated society. Overwhelmed by internet research and using a satellite navigation system, Kluftinger uses his good old "sniffer dog nose" and in the end he is able to solve the case using intuition and combination skills.



The fact that you can find the headings *Kluftinger's Allgäu Tips* and *Klufti's Kitchen* on the website set up by the authors Kobr and Klüpfel alongside information about their crime novels is probably intended as an ironic barb, but it also adds depth to the human dimension of this detective, who has what it takes to be a figure with whom his numerous fans can identify even beyond the plot of the novel.

Crime novels with antiheroes are an avoidance of "naïve realism" and an indirect criticism of the information-orientated society. The detectives Brenner, Kluftinger or Kemal Kayankaya (Jakob Arjouni) rely on their inner instincts and in doing so are able to exist in a world of abundance.

Jennifer Endro
is a trainee in the field of "Literature and the Translation Grant
Programme" at the Goethe-Institut.

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the fall of the
wall and the
process of Germany's
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